



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT STRUAN PRIMARY SCHOOL, RE-ASSIGNING ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THAT OF DUNVEGAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Dunvegan Primary School.

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting held at Struan Primary School on 20 March 2023.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 15 February 2023, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Struan Primary School, re-assigning its catchment to that of Dunvegan Primary School.

- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - E** are the appendices to the original proposal.
- 1.3 Struan Primary School has been mothballed since April 2022, when the school roll fell to two.
- 1.4 Having once again reviewed the status of Struan Primary, it is the Council's view that there is a lack of children of suitable age in the Struan catchment, who wish to attend Struan Primary School, and that consequently the school is no longer viable. Further details on this are provided in Sections 6 and 10 below.
- 1.5 Struan Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has had special regard to:
- any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5-10 below.
 - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community. The effect on the local community was considered at Section 15 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 8 and 10 below, taking into account representations received during consultation.
 - the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
 - the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact. The effects on school transport were considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 and 10 below.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period Thursday 23 February 2023 to Friday 21 April 2023. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:
- (i) Parents of pupils attending Dunvegan and Carbost Primary Schools; including parents of pre-school pupils.
 - (ii) The Parent Councils of Dunvegan and Carbost Primary Schools
 - (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
 - (iv) Staff of Dunvegan and Carbost Primary Schools.

(v) Trade Union representatives.

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held at Struan Primary School on 20 March 2023. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website, Twitter Account and Facebook page, and in the *West Highland Free Press*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.

3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

4.0 Responses received

4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 3 written responses (not including the pupil questionnaires). Copies of these responses can also be found at Appendices 3i-3iii.

4.2 The views of pupils at Dunvegan Primary School (which included the pupils living within the Struan catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire. Appendix 3iv summarises their views, which are also discussed at Section 5 below.

5.0 Overview of Issues raised during the consultation period

5.1 There were 47 responses from pupils. Three pupils thought the Council should re-open Struan Primary School, whilst 44 thought the school should be permanently closed. None of the pupils supported continued mothballing. The detailed comments from pupils can be viewed at Appendix 3iv.

5.2 Education Scotland Inspectors who visited the school reported that almost all the children at Dunvegan Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposals. They looked forward to having more friends.

5.3 The arguments advanced by the pupils in favour of re-opening the school, are set out at Issues 1-3 below, together with arguments put forward in support of closure. The responses encountered by Education Scotland are set out at paragraph 7.4 below.

- 5.4 There were 3 written responses received from other stakeholders. None of these objected to the closure of the school, but rather raised issues about the proposal to re-assign the Struan catchment to that of Dunvegan Primary School. Two of the responses suggested re-assigning the Struan catchment to that of Carbost Primary School, and the other suggested re-assigning it to that of Portree Primary School or Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort-Rìgh, depending on whether children were accessing English Medium or Gaelic Medium education.
- 5.5 The public meeting was well-attended, given the small size of the local community. Although sadness was expressed over the demise of the school, there was a general feeling that closure was inevitable due to the lack of the children in the area. The bulk of the questions raised concerned the future of the building following confirmation of the school closure, even though officials made it clear that closure could not be assumed.
- 5.6 The main arguments put forward are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Where different responses raise similar issues, these have been “grouped” for the purposes of the response.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised in Public Consultation

- 6.1 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of continued mothballing are set out at Issues 1-3 below, and addressed at Responses 1-3.

Issue 1

It has a really good football pitch and other facilities – it would be a shame for kids not to use it.

Response 1

If the school closes, the community are interested in taking over the site, so there might still be an opportunity for local children to use some of the facilities.

Issue 2

It's not fair to force someone to go elsewhere if they don't want to.

Response 2

Almost all the parents who live in Struan have sent their children elsewhere anyway, and it is better for children to attend other schools where there are more children.

Issue 3

The extra travel might be an issue for some families.

Response 3

Anyone who is old enough for school will get school transport to Dunvegan from Struan, paid for by the Council.

- 6.2 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of closing Struan Primary School are set out at Issues 4-5 below, and addressed at Responses 4-5.

Issue 4

There will be more opportunities to make lots of friends if they come to Dunvegan instead.

They will have more friends when they move on to High School.

It would be nice to have more children at Dunvegan.

Response 4

The Highland Council agrees with these comments.

Issue 5

The school could be turned into something for the community such as a laser tag space, a community centre with lots of different things going on, houses for people, a playgroup or lots of apartments for people needing a house.

Response 5

If the school closes, the community are interested in taking over the site. If that happens the community could put their own ideas for the site into practice.

- 6.3 The arguments advanced in written responses are set out at Issues 6-7 below, and addressed at Responses 6-7.

Issue 6

Can consideration please be given to the catchment for Struan children being Portree Primary and Bun Sgoil Ghaidhlig Phort Righ?

The majority of children in Struan already attend school or nursery in Portree, this being their preferred option to Dunvegan.

This could potentially save money for Highland Council due to a school bus already travelling on the Struan to Portree route.

The Portree schools offer considerably more opportunities for children from both schools to socialise together at numerous after school clubs in the area.

In terms of educational benefit Portree offers standalone EM and GME options as opposed to mixed schools, which in terms of GM immersion clearly increases the quality of their language and education.

Response 6

In respect of Portree Primary School, the comparative distances and travel times from the current Struan Primary are, 8.8 miles and 15 minutes to Dunvegan, or 11.3 miles and 27 minutes to Portree via the most direct route, which is on single track roads. The alternative route via Sligachan is 23.3 miles and 36 minutes.

Whilst therefore, Portree does offer some advantages in terms of access to after-school activities, there is a clear geographical argument for Dunvegan to be the receiving school for the Struan children.

In respect of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort-Rìgh, HM Inspectors comment, in their report, that *“The council, in making its final decision, should be clear on parents’ access to total immersion as well as immersion alongside English Medium Education.”*

In line with the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, Highland Council has been undertaking a programme of creating Gàidhlig medium catchment areas for those schools that offer GME. The GM catchment areas for Dunvegan and for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort-Rìgh were defined in 2018 after a statutory consultation exercise which included public meetings in both communities, and which involved Education Scotland as required by legislation. At that time the Struan area was zoned to Dunvegan for the purposes of GME.

Highland Council’s scheme of school enrolment is based on the principle of catchment areas, and of automatic enrolment in the designated school for a pupil’s home address. In the case of a Gàidhlig medium pupils from Struan, this is Dunvegan Primary School, and has been since 2018.

The above catchment definitions could only be changed via a further statutory consultation. It is not Highland Council policy to allow pupils to have a choice of two catchment schools.

Parents can of course submit placing requests for their children to attend a school other than the designated catchment school.

Issue 7

We are concerned about the future of Carbost Primary with regard to intake numbers. Our school roll will drop to 18 children next school year. We

understand that some areas of the Struan catchment are closer to Dunvegan but feel that south of Struan, Coillore (causeway) and settlements towards Carbost (such as Gesto, Sumardale and Meadle) should be in the Carbost Primary catchment area. We need to attract families to our school and area, but to do this we need nursery and school-age children in the first place. We are concerned at the unequal balance afforded by one school getting larger, having a larger budget, more resources to offer children, to the detriment of the other. Our children used to benefit from Struan pupils visiting, widening social opportunities for children; a big plus when sometimes there may be only 1 child in a school year group.

Re-aligning the catchment to Carbost would be supporting a small school which we hear nothing but good things about and praise from other parents. I think Highland council should strongly consider Struan area to be taken it Carbost catchment than pushing pupils to Dunvegan which as far as I'm aware already have healthy pupil numbers. If the council themselves don't push to support small schools this could potentially lead to another closure which would result in a long travel for pupils from that area. My understanding at present there isn't any children from Struan area attending Carbost primary but the ones that attend Dunvegan were already there before moving to the Struan area. My personal preference would be should we removed our child from Gaelic would be Carbost primary.

Response 7

The Council is mindful that there is some merit in the arguments set out above, and is appreciative of the position at Carbost Primary. Having carefully considered the issue, we are however minded to maintain the suggestion made in the Proposal Paper, that the Struan catchment should be re-allocated to Dunvegan Primary School. In coming to this view we have considered the following factors:

- Amongst the parents of children currently within the Struan catchment, there is a clear preference for sending children to Dunvegan rather than Carbost;
- HM Inspectors considered this issue and reported that *"The consultees with whom HM Inspectors met supported assigning the catchment area to Bunscoil Dhùn Bheagain - Dunvegan Primary School. They did not feel that assigning some of the catchment area of Struan Primary School to that of Carbost Primary School would bring educational benefits to children currently attending Carbost Primary School, or in the future."*
- Children from the Struan catchment who already attend Dunvegan Primary School are unlikely to move to Carbost Primary School. The number of pre-school children within the Struan catchment is so small that in practical terms the decision is unlikely to have a significant impact on the roll.
- Dunvegan Primary School is itself a small rural school, albeit one with a larger roll than Carbost.

7.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 7.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 7.2 In their report, Education Scotland agree that The Highland Council's proposal will result in educational benefits for the children of Struan Primary School catchment area. They note that the council is responding to a decline in demand for education in the catchment area of Struan Primary School, and that there is a consensus among those consulted that the closure of the school is inevitable and that the school building could be used to benefit the community.
- 7.3 Education Scotland further noted that the consultees with whom HM Inspectors met supported assigning the catchment area to Dunvegan Primary School. They did not feel that assigning some of the catchment area of Struan Primary School to that of Carbost Primary School would bring educational benefits to children currently attending Carbost Primary School, or in the future.
- 7.4 The following issues were identified for further consideration, and are set out below.

Issue 8

At the meetings with HM Inspectors, there was some further interest shown by the consultees in enabling parents in the Struan area to have an option for their children to attend Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh. This is to experience the benefits of total immersion approaches in the language. The council, in making its final decision, should be clear on parents' access to total immersion as well as immersion alongside English Medium Education.

Response 8

See Response 6 above.

Issue 9

The council has produced equalities and rural impact assessments to inform their approaches. The Council should also consider undertaking an island community impact assessment.

Response 9

The Council has considered the island location of Struan Primary School, but has concluded that the proposed closure is not likely to have an effect on the island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities. As Skye is a large island, it offers alternative educational provision at distances similar to other rural locations in Highland, and indeed significantly closer than the alternatives available to some mainland

communities. The circumstances of Struan Primary School are not noticeably different from those of other rural schools in Highland.

As set out in the Proposal Paper, the nearest alternative provision to Struan Primary School is Dunvegan Primary School, located 8.8 miles away. The travel time between Struan Primary School and Dunvegan Primary School is approximately 14 minutes, a figure well within the normal range of travel for school pupils in the Highland Council area.

The proposal will provide educational benefits and greater opportunities for socialisation for children from the Struan area, and these opportunities will continue to be offered within the context of the island environment of Skye.

Issue 10

The Council should provide further reassurances to parents at Carbost Primary School on the rationale for realignment of catchment areas.

Response 10

See Response 7 above.

Issue 11

It will be important that the council continues to collaborate with the local community of Struan in realising their ambitions for the school building and land, should the proposal be approved. The council should do this in a timely manner to maintain momentum for the community's proposed use of the building, and to avoid the condition of the building deteriorating from not being used.

Response 11

The Council accepts and agrees with this recommendation.

8.0 Effects on the Community

- 8.1 Paragraphs 15.1 - 15.3 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community, and advised that Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community to see whether the current school building and site could be turned over to community use.
- 8.2 The future of the site and building was one of the main issues that arose in the consultation exercise. As previously discussed, the Council cannot prejudge the outcome of the current consultation by agreeing any future use of the building at this stage. In the event the closure is approved, the Council would welcome a community bid for the future use of the building and site.

8.3 The consultation exercise did not identify any other effects on the community from the proposal.

9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

9.1 There were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

10.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure

10.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper identified and discussed the following alternatives to closure:

- i. To continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.
- ii. To re-open Struan Primary School with its current catchment area.
- iii. To re-open Struan Primary School with an expanded catchment area.
- iv. To re-open Struan Primary School as a school offering Gaelic Medium Education

10.2 Sections 7 and 8 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council’s consideration as to why Options i and ii above would not be viable options for Struan Primary School. No additional suggestions were made during consultation.

10.3 Similarly, in respect of option (iii) in paragraph 10.1 above, Section 9 of the original Proposal Paper set out the reasons why an expanded catchment area would not be a viable option for Struan Primary School. Again, no suggestion to this effect was made during consultation. The comments made in consultation concerning catchment areas were about how to re-allocate the former Struan catchment once the school is closed, and not to expand the current catchment.

10.4 Section 10 of the Proposal Paper set out why it is not be viable to re-open Struan Primary School as a school offering GME only. The public consultation exercise did not identify any support for such a proposal.

10.5 Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal.

10.6 No further alternative approaches were suggested during the consultation exercise:

10.7 The Council has also reconsidered the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to;

(a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 15 of the Proposal Paper and is further considered at Section 8 above.

- 10.8 The Council has further reconsidered the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.

The impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Section 13 of the original proposal paper. Since Struan Primary School has been mothballed since April 2022, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. Whilst it is accepted that the travel times would be shorter were Struan Primary School to re-open, the travel times to Dunvegan are not excessive and are well within the normal range of school journeys in Highland.

11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

- 11.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 14 September 2023 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on 4 October 2023. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 8 November 2023 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Struan Primary School is asked to email schoolclosure@gov.scot or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by midnight on 4 October 2023.**
- 11.3 Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

12.0 Legal issues

- 12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

12.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

13.0 Financial Implications

13.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix F to the Proposal Paper.

14.0 Equality Impact Assessment

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at Section 17 of the Proposal Paper. The consultation exercise did not identify any additional equality issues.

15.0 Rural Impact Assessment/Island Community Impact Assessment

15.1 A Rural Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at Section 18 of the Proposal Paper. The public consultation exercise did not identify any additional rural issues, but HM Inspectors, in their report, recommended that the Highland Council carry out an Island Community Impact Assessment, to complement that undertaken for Rural Impact. The results of that assessment are outlined at Response 9 above.

16.0 Effects on School Transport

16.1 The effects on school transport were considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper. As there are no pupils currently attending Struan Primary School, there are no differing school transport arrangements to take into account.

17.0 Mitigation of Adverse Effects

17.1 Adverse effects were considered at S.19 of the proposal Paper, and none were identified. Again, this assessment takes into account the fact that there are currently no pupils attending Struan Primary School.

18.0 Conclusion

18.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern.

These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 above. For the reasons set out in detail in sections 5-10 above, Highland Council considers that implementation of the closure proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

- 18.2 The most significant reason for closure is that all the available evidence suggests that the number of children who would attend a re-opened Struan Primary School would be too low to make the school viable, and that there would consequently be educational disadvantages arising from such a decision. Lastly, Dunvegan Primary School is itself a rural school.
- 18.3 Education Scotland staff visited Dunvegan Primary School, to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses. They agree that The Highland Council's proposal will result in educational benefits for the children of Struan Primary School catchment area.
- 18.4 The Executive Chief Officer (Education), on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the proposal offers educational benefits and that implementation of the Proposal in full is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the Proposal. The reasons for this conclusion are set out at Sections 5-10 above.

19.0 Recommendation

- 19.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Dunvegan Primary School.

Nicky Grant
Executive Chief Officer (Education)
9 August 2023